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ABSTRACT

South Carolina is developing and implementing assessment processes for two programs aimed at improving the quality of education in the state. One program involves recognizing outstanding progress by individual meritorious schools. The other program provides for state intervention in districts that fail to meet educational quality standards. Both programs feature two-step assessment procedures that first evaluate multiple indicators of educational outcomes and then follow up with on-site evaluations of educational processes and practices. This paper outlines the major features of both programs, noting the criteria and standards to be met and the actions to be taken if schools meet or districts fail to meet their respective standards. (PGD)

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Abstract

Identifying Meritorious Schools
vs.
Academically Deficient School Districts

By Terry K. Peterson
Executive Assistant for Education
South Carolina Governor's Office
June 12, 1985

Recognition of meritorious schools has potential for improving instruction. The individual school is the configuration in education which comes closest to a self-contained unit of management and production, similar to a plant site in a large business. In addition, students, parents and most members of a community tend to identify themselves with a particular school, not with a school district or classroom. The above stated conditions make the school site a promising location for making educational improvement by providing incentives for outstanding progress.

On the other hand, "outside intervention" into school districts is also warranted in extreme conditions when multiple indicators of educational performance are below acceptable standards. State government is legally charged with the responsibility for public education and provides a major share of the funding. Considering the high mobility of today's population and the long-term costs to the entire state for increased welfare, prison and health costs resulting from poor education, toleration of poor educational performance in certain districts makes little sense educationally or economically.

The paper outlines features of both of these programs being developed and implemented in South Carolina.

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Recognition of meritorious schools has potential for improving instruction. The individual school is the configuration in education which comes closest to a self-contained unit of management and production, similar to a plant site in a large business. In addition, students, parents and most members of a community tend to identify themselves with a particular school, not with a school district or classroom. The above stated conditions make the school site a promising location for making educational improvement by providing incentives for outstanding progress.

On the other hand, "outside intervention" into school districts is also warranted in extreme conditions when multiple indicators of educational performance are below acceptable standards. State government is legally charged with the responsibility for public education and provides a major share of the funding. Considering the high mobility of today's population and the long-term costs to the entire state for increased welfare, prison and health costs resulting from poor education, toleration of poor educational performance in certain districts makes little sense educationally or economically.

The determination of both meritorious schools and academically deficient school districts should involve at least a two-step process of assessment. The initial step should evaluate multiple indicators of outcomes. The second phase should include an on-site evaluation of multiple indicators of educational processes and practices which are likely related to effective schools or school districts.

South Carolina is attempting to develop and implement such assessment processes for a meritorious schools program and an academically deficient school district program. What follows is an outline of the features of both of these programs.

MERITORIOUS SCHOOLS PROGRAM IN SOUTH CAROLINA
(To be operational 1985-86)

A. Criteria and Standards for Selection

1. Outcome Criteria and Standards

- a. Significant gains in reading and math performance on State criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests. These criteria and standards must be met for selection.
- b. Average student attendance of 176 out of 180 instructional days.
- c. Average teacher attendance of 176 out of 180 instructional days.
- d. Positive student attitude toward learning (4.0 on a 5.0 point scale).
- e. Improved parent participation (4.0 on a 5.0 point scale).

2. Process Criteria

- a. Comprehensive needs assessment and short and long-range plans of school improvement to address needs and problems.
- b. Well articulated and sequenced curricula.
- c. Positive school climate.
- d. Supportive instructional environment.
- e. High expectations.
- f. Business and community involvement in the schools.
- g. Clear and focused mission.

B. Actions If Criteria and Standards Met

- 1. A \$5,000 to \$25,000 state award per school (amount varying by size of school and number of criteria and standards met).
 - a. Award must be used to make further achievement gains and improve excellence in the schools (not for compensation of existing staff).

- b. School Improvement Council (includes elected parents, teachers, and, in high schools, students, along with the principal and his/her appointees) shall provide advice on the use of the school incentive grant award.

C. Process for Making Selection Decisions

- 1. 75-100 site visitors will be trained to conduct one-day on-site visitations and report findings to one of the Statewide Review Panels.
- 2. Two Statewide Review Panels, one for elementary schools and one for secondary schools (composed of 15 highly reputable persons from education and private sector), will make selections based on Outcome and Process Criteria and Standards.

ACADEMICALLY DEFICIENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS PROGRAM IN
SOUTH CAROLINA (Started Spring 1985)

A. Criteria and Standards for Selection

- 1. Unsatisfactory student performance on one-third of the minimum criteria standards of basic skills achievement on the State criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests in selected grades.
 - a. Scoring lower than the average of the statewide "free lunch" population, or
 - b. Not meeting the average achievement gain of "free lunch" children.
- 2. Unsatisfactory performance on one-third of the following indicators of quality:
 - a. Any school on probation from the State's accreditation system.
 - b. Any school with 10 percent of classes taught by personnel teaching out of their field of certification.
 - c. Any school allotting less instructional time or offering fewer courses than required in the areas of language, arts or mathematics.
 - d. Drop-out rate for grades 9-12 in the district exceeding 10 percent of enrollment in grades 9-12.

- e. Average daily attendance is less than 94 percent in grades K-8*.
- f. Average daily attendance is less than 93 percent in grades 9-12*.

B. Actions if Criteria and Standards Not Met

- 1. For districts performing unsatisfactorily on one-third or more of the criteria and standards:
 - a. A review committee is sent to the district to study indepth district, school and classroom operations and procedures as well as the public school-community relationships using:
 - i. Teacher and principal observation.
 - ii. Test and curricula analyses.
 - iii. Confidential interviews with representative educators, parents, students and community members.
 - iv. District policies and budgets.
 - b. Once the State Board of Education approves the recommendations from the review committee to correct the deficiencies, the district has six months to demonstrate satisfactory progress in implementing the recommendations.
 - c. Failure to implement the recommendations satisfactorily will result in the State Superintendent of Education:
 - i. continuing to provide technical assistance toward implementation, or
 - ii. initiating action toward the declaration of a state of emergency and withholding of funds, or
 - iii. recommending to the Governor that the local superintendent's position be declared vacant.

* Standard will be increased for 1985-86.

2. For districts not meeting all standards, but more than two-thirds of the standards, appropriate output objectives within their regular District Improvement Reports must be developed to which address these problem areas.

CONCLUSION

Identifying both meritorious schools and academically deficient school districts can contribute to improved educational opportunities and student learning. Together they demonstrate a State's commitment to recognize excellence and improvement and to disapprove of unsatisfactory educational conditions in local school districts.

The state-of-the art in broad and large scale assessments, and the capability to translate those assessments into terms which most educators, school boards, parents, business leaders and the media can use and understand, could be the key ingredients in determining if either or both of these are to be successful approaches toward improving public education.